SPORT

Fiorentina honour deceased Commisso with crucial victory at Bologna

MILAN: Fiorentina honoured deceased owner Rocco Commisso with Sunday's 2-1 win at off-form Bologna which boosted their Serie A survival bid.

Without a win until just before Christmas, Fiorentina claimed a deserved third success in six matches thanks to goals in the first half from Rolando Mandragora and Roberto Piccoli.

Paolo Vanoli's side sit just inside the relegation zone but level on 17 points with Lecce, who are 17th and face AC Milan.

Fiorentina have a superior goal difference than Lecce and only sit below them by virtue of having played a game more.

That means a defeat for Lecce at the San Siro against title-chasing Milan would push Fiorentina, who less than a month ago looked destined for the drop, out of the bottom three.

Sunday's win was a fine way to pay tribute to American media mogul Commisso, who passed away on Saturday at the age of 76 and was remembered with a minute's silence ahead of kick-off.

During pre-match preparations, Fiorentina players wore T-shirts with a picture of Commisso and the message "Thanks Rocco", in tribute to a man who just missed out on giving the Tuscan club a first major trophy since 2001.

In Saturday's late match, Juventus' Serie A title ambitions are all but over after they suffered a 1-0 defeat at Cagliari, in a game where the visitors were unable to make their domination of possession count.

Juventus sit fifth in the standings on 39 points, 10 behind leaders Inter Milan, who beat Udinese 1-0 on Saturday. Cagliari are 15th on 22 points, the win taking them eight points away from the relegation zone.

Cagliari failed to register a shot attempt in the opening half but scored a shock winner when Luca Mazzitelli scored with 25 minutes remaining to end Juve's six-match unbeaten league run.

"You tip your hat to your opponents, who brought home a victory that perhaps they didn't deserve, but sniffed out the opportunity and took it," Juventus manager Luciano Spalletti told Sky Sport. "Maybe next time we can learn from that and sniff out our chance too."

Earlier on Saturday, champions Napoli ended a run of three consecutive draws by beating Sassuolo 1-0 at home to get their bid to retain the Serie A title back on track.

Stanislav Lobotka scored the only goal of the game but the win came at a cost for injury-hit Napoli as defender Amir Rrahmani and forward Matteo Politano both picked up knocks, with coach Antonio Conte already missing Romelu Lukaku, Kevin De Bruyne, Andre Anguissa and David Neres.—Agencies

MADRID: Deportivo Alaves Antonio Sivera makes a save during the La Liga match against Atletico Madrid at the Metropolitano Stadium on Sunday.—AFP

Sorloth header seals win for Atletico over Alaves

MADRID: Alexander Sorloth's towering header secured Atletico Madrid a narrow 1-0 victory against Deportivo Alaves in La Liga on Sunday to maintain their distant pursuit of leaders Barcelona.

Diego Simeone's side stay fourth in the standings with 41 points, level with Villarreal, who sit third with a game in hand, following their 2-0 loss to Real Betis on Saturday.

Barcelona, with a game in hand, lead the table with 49 points and were scheduled to visit Real Sociedad.

"There are no easy games and we're happy for the victory," Atletico midfielder Pablo Barrios told DAZN. "Sorloth is a player who gives us a lot, who can help us break through in games which are blocked up, with crosses."

The winner arrived three minutes into the second half as Barrios whipped in a precise cross from the right wing, allowing Sorloth to rise above the defence and nod a powerful header off the post and into the net.

"It wasn't to be, we knew it was hard to play here, they haven't lost here yet," said Alaves, who are 18th on the table, defender Jonny Otto. "We know we're down near the foot of the table but it's still quite even... the team is fighting well."

On Saturday, Villarreal, third, stumbled to a defeat at La Cartuja, hampering their attempts at mounting a title challenge.

Aitor Ruibal and Pablo Fornals's second-half goals helped Betis earn an impressive victory over Marcelino Garcia Toral's visitors.

The loss leaves Villarreal eight points behind leaders Barcelona and damaged their chances of competing for a first-ever La Liga title.

Betis had more of the ball in an otherwise even first half before Ruibal volleyed them ahead after 57 minutes.

Santi Comesana's red card for a rash challenge on Giovani Lo Celso made Villarreal's job harder and Fornals killed the game by drilling home with precision from outside the area with seven minutes remaining.

"It was a hard-fought game, the details led to Betis winning, I think a draw would have been fairest," Villarreal midfielder Dani Parejo told Movistar.

"We lacked the finishing touch but had some clear chances... I think the team showed up well, but in both boxes we weren't quite good enough."—Agencies

Asif set up defending champion clash as national snooker reach last-16

KARACHI: Veteran Mohammad Asif roared back into form with a blistering display, setting up a blockbuster prequarter-final against defending champion Shahid Aftab as the National Snooker Championship narrowed to its final 16 contenders on Sunday.

Stung by his group stage loss a day earlier, the three-time world champion was in imperious touch, dismantling Zulfiqar A. Qadir 4-0 in the last-24 round. Asif sealed his dominance with back-to-back century breaks of 129 and 119, reasserting his title credentials.

His victory sets the stage for the tournament's most anticipated clash yet. A last-16 showdown on Monday against the title-holder Shahid, who eliminated Asif in last year's championship.

The day's other major upset saw Shan Namat of Islamabad oust seventh seed Ian Mark John 4-2. Shan's reward is a tough pre-quarter against former national champion Asjad Iqbal.

Young prodigy Hasnain Akhtar continued his promising run, seeing off Asif Toba 4-2 with the help of an 87 break. He will now face fellow Sindh player Sohail Shehzad in the next round.

Last year's runner-up Mohammad Sajjad avoided an early exit, recovering from a slow start to beat Sultan Mohammad 4-2. His path forward is equally daunting, as he next meets the in-form Ahmar Tariq.The remaining last-24 matches proceeded with minimal drama. Awaisullah Munir defeated Zaib Khan 4-2, while A. Sattar, Aakash Rafique and Abdul Javed also secured their places in the last-16 with victories.—Sports Reporter

Lens hold off Auxerre to retake top spot from PSG

LENS: RC Lens returned to the top of Ligue 1 with a battling 1-0 win over lowly Auxerre on Saturday, while Olympique de Marseille emphatically bounced back to winning ways against Angers to stay on the pacesetters' tails.

Reigning French and European champions Paris St-Germain had taken over at the summit on Friday following their Ousmane Dembele-inspired 3-0 home victory over Lille.

But Lens riposted less than 24 hours later as they brought their winning streak to 10 matches across all competitions courtesy of a second-half strike by Wesley Said at their Stade Bollaert-Delelis home.

The French youth international's eighth league goal of the season was enough to earn Pierre Sage's team three points and restore their one-point buffer at the top of the table.

Lens coach Sage later regretted his surprise league leaders' recent tendency to start matches in a sluggish manner.

"I don't think we're running out of steam because (if we were) we wouldn't be able to turn things around as we did in the second half," Sage said.

"In any case, I think these are signs to be taken seriously."

Defeat leaves Auxerre 17th, four points from safety.

In Saturday's late match, Marseille stayed within eight points of Lens with a comfortable 5-2 win at mid-table Angers.

Roberto De Zerbi's third-placed side kept their hopes of mounting a title challenge intact thanks to a barnstorming first half in which Amine Gouiri, Mason Greenwood, Hamed Traore and Timothy Weah all found the back of the net.

Amine Sbai scored for the hosts in first-half stoppage time but following a thrilling opening salvo, the second period produced just two late goals after the match was already effectively over as Marseille coasted to their first league win of 2026.

Toulouse put free-falling Nice through the wringer in a dominant 5-1 win as the south coast side remain just four points above the relegation playoff zone.—AFP

12-wicket Noman powers Ghani Glass to commanding win over Wapda

KARACHI: Test spinner Noman Ali produced a career-best match haul to spearhead Ghani Glass' emphatic 106-run victory over Wapda as the fourth round of the President's Trophy concluded here on Sunday.

Noman, leading Ghani Glass, claimed figures of seven for 59 and five for 45 to finish with 12 for 104 in the match, bettering his previous best of 12 for 114.

Chasing a target of 243, Wapda resumed on the fourth day at 108 for five but were bundled out for 136 in 45.3 overs, with the left-armer picking up his 36th five-wicket haul in first-class cricket. Test fast bowler Khurram Shahzad supported him well, taking four for 40.

Despite the defeat, Wapda stayed atop the points table with 81 points, having won their first three matches. Pakistan Television are second with 71 points.

At another venue, Sahir Associates registered their first win of the season by defeating Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) by 64 runs after successfully defending a modest target of 156.

Pacers Khan Zaib (5-34) and Razaullah (5-37) shared all 10 wickets in the second innings, bowling 27 of the 29 overs between them. OGDCL slumped to 32 for six before Mohammad Sarwar Afridi resisted with an unbeaten 41 off 53 balls, including six fours, but the visitors were eventually dismissed for 91.

Meanwhile, Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) also completed a comfortable win. Earlier in the day, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) resumed at 289 for nine and were dismissed for 302, with Shahid Aziz completing his third first-class half-century (54 off 68 balls, four fours and three sixes).

Set a target of 41, KRL needed just 8.4 overs to wrap up the chase as openers Shahzaib Khan (25 not out) and Saad Baig (18 not out) saw their side home. KRL are now third on the table with 68 points, two ahead of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL).

In the fourth fixture of the round, Pakistan Television pulled off a thrilling two-run win over SNGPL on Saturday.—Sports Reporter

NONTHABURI (Thailand): Pakistan's Nisar Hussain (C) vies for the ball with Sri Lanka's Mohamed Kursheeth Mohamed Shajaan (L) and Mohamed Aman Mohamed Faizer during their SAFF Futsal Championship match at the Nonthaburi Stadium on Sunday. Substitute Ali Agha scored twice as Pakistan won 5-2 to record their second win in a row at the tournament. The victory moved Pakistan to second spot in the standings with six points from two matches, level with leaders Maldives, who have a game in hand. Pakistan are next in action on Tuesday when they face Nepal, who are third with four points from two matches.—Courtesy SAFF

One Man Band dazzles

LAHORE: Bay colt One Man Band put up an amazing display of speed to land the Democracy Cup run over 1800 meters in brilliant style at the Racecourse here on Sunday.

Under a superb ride from Jockey Shahbaz, the colt came from behind to overtake front runners Sardar Bay and Hall Road to win the prestigious cup race clocking one minute 53 4/5 seconds.

Soon after the race, joint owners Wali Mohammad Awan and Atta M. Khan received the cup from steward Syed Pervez Hussain.

The winner was trained by Shahid Rehman. A card of seven races was gone through and attended by a large crowd of fans.—Aftab Gilani

Jeong snatches Union late draw at Stuttgart in Bundesliga

STUTTGART: Union Berlin's Jeong Woo-yeong (second R) scores past VfB Stuttgart's goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel during their Bundesliga match on Sunday.—AFP

BERLIN: Union Berlin's Woo-yeong Jeong scored with seven minutes remaining to snatch his side a point in a 1-1 draw at VfB Stuttgart in the Bundesliga on Sunday.

Germany winger Chris Fuehrich's goal had Stuttgart on course for third spot but the South Korean's late equaliser leaves the German Cup holders in fourth, a point ahead of fifth-placed RB Leipzig.

Unfancied Union are now unbeaten since early December, a run of five matches, and sit eighth, five points behind the European placings.

After a first-half with few chances for either side, Fuehrich put the hosts in front just before the hour mark.

Stuttgart defender Ramon Hendriks charged forward before finding Fuehrich, who hit a low shot just inside the left-hand post.

Germany midfielder Angelo Stiller had a golden chance to double Stuttgart's lead with 10 minutes remaining but blasted wide with the goal beckoning and only Union goalie Frederik Ronnow to beat.

The miss came back to haunt the hosts almost immediately when former Stuttgart forward Jeong sliced his shot into the top corner on the 83rd-minute mark.

Jeong, who did not celebrate his goal, had a chance to steal the match against his former employers in the dying moments, but his strike was well saved by Stuttgart's Alexander Nuebel.

On Saturday, leaders Bayern Munich powered back from a goal down, scoring three goals in six minutes, to crush hosts RB Leipzig 5-1 and maintain their 11-point advantage at the top.

Bayern scored all five goals in the second half to maintain their unbeaten run in the league this season and moved up to 50 points.

Antonio Nusa gave hosts the early lead but Serge Gnabry fired in his 100th goal for the club to level the score.

The Bavarians completed their turnaround with the Bundesliga's leading scorer Harry Kane finding space at the far post to put them in front with his 21st league.

But they were far from done were far from done, scoring three more times through Jonathan Tah's 82nd-minute header and goals from Aleksandar Pavlovic in the 85th and Michael Olise who completed the comeback win in style.—Agencies

Lookman gives Nigeria third place after AFCON shoot-out with Egypt

CASABLANCA: Ademola Lookman converted the spot-kick that gave Nigeria a 4-2 penalty shoot-out victory over Egypt after a 0-0 draw on Saturday in the Africa Cup of Nations third place play-off.

Victory for the Super Eagles in Casablanca followed the disappointment of losing shoot-outs that cost them chances to compete at the 2026 World Cup and in the 2025 AFCON final.

Nigeria lost on penalties to the Democratic Republic of Congo last November in a play-off for a place in the World Cup intercontinental play-offs.

Then, three days ago, they lost another shoot-out to fail against hosts Morocco in an AFCON semi-final.

Success maintained a perfect Nigerian record in third place AFCON matches after seven previous play-offs victories.

Before Lookman scored, Fisayo Dele-Bashiru missed the Eagles' first kick, then Akor Adams, captain Moses Simon and Alex Iwobi scored.

Premier League pair Mohamed Salah and Omar Marmoush both had kicks saved by Stanley Nwabali before Ramy Rabia and Mahmoud Saber scored.

Egypt made six changes and Nigeria five to the teams that started semi-final losses to Senegal and hosts Morocco, respectively, three days ago.

Captain Salah started for the Pharaohs while traditional first choices in goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy and forward Marmoush were among the substitutes.

Attackers Victor Osimhen and Lookman, both former winners of the annual African player of the year award, sat on the bench for Nigeria.

Most Moroccans in a crowd that nearly filled the 45,000-capacity Stade Mohammed V backed Nigeria. They whistled whenever Egypt gained possession and when coach Hossam Hassan was shown on the big screen.

This support for the Super Eagles was attributed to the great rivalry between Morocco and Egypt, both at national team and club levels.

Nigeria initially, then Egypt had spells of dominance in a goalless opening half on a cold, cloudy evening in the Moroccan commercial capital.

Paul Onuachu thought he had broken the deadlock on 36 minutes as he deflected the ball with his head past goalkeeper Mostafa Shobeir.

However, a VAR review by the Moroccan referee revealed Onuachu had accidentally struck Hamdy Fathy with an elbow. The goal was disallowed and the Nigerian yellow-carded.

Lookman was introduced by coach Eric Chelle for the second half, replacing Onuachu, and he had the ball in the net in the opening minute of the second period. However, the goal was ruled out for offside.

Nigeria started after the break with a series of attacks. Following a largely uneventful first half, Shobeir — the son of former Egypt goalkeeper Ahmed Shobeir — was forced to make several saves.

Salah seldom threatened and when he did cut in with the ball, the potential danger was quickly averted. Marmoush came on as the play-off passed the hour mark to try and boost a blunt strike force.

But as the match entered the final 10 minutes there was no sign of Osimhen being brought on, suggesting he might not have been fully fit.

In quick succession, Adams, then Marmoush threatened to score, but neither could deliver the finishing touch under pressure from opponents.

Salah then disappointed when offered a scoring opportunity from a free-kick outside the box. He hit the ball straight into the wall and it was swiftly cleared.—AFP

EGYPT'S Mostafa Mohamed shoots at goal during the Africa Cup of Nations match against Nigeria at the Mohammed V Stadium.—AFP